

Planning Fire Support for Attack Helicopters



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Combined arms warfare produces effects that are greater than the sum of the individual parts...The application of combined arms in this manner is complex and demanding. It requires detailed planning and violent execution by highly trained soldiers and units who have been thoroughly rehearsed.

FM 100-5 Operations

“To survive and succeed on the battlefield, the attack helicopter battalion must fight as an integrated member of the combined arms team”—as stated in *FM 1-112 Attack Helicopter Battalion*. Also as members of the combined arms team, fire supporters can help our aviation brethren “survive and succeed.”

Fire support in the attack helicopter battalion is much more than suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD). Fire support

can play a broader role in helping the attack helicopter battalion execute its missions. This article focuses on techniques to integrate fire support as an effective combat multiplier during the attack helicopter battalion planning process.

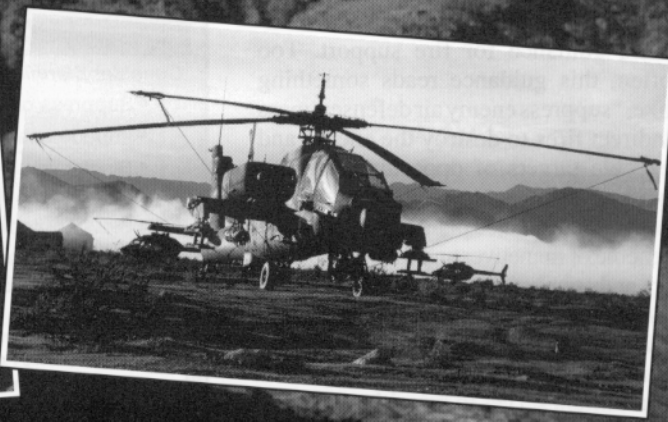
Aviation Fire Support

Fire support for the attack helicopter battalion is fundamentally the same as fire support for any ground maneuver

battalion. However there are some key differences.

Supporting Artillery. The attack helicopter battalion and aviation brigade have no habitually related artillery in direct support (DS). Normally, the attack helicopter battalion receives its artillery fire support from the organization it is attached to or operationally controlled (OPCON) by. This support usually comes from division or corps general support (GS) artillery.

Fire Support Element (FSE). The attack helicopter battalion FSE is not as robust as its ground maneuver counterparts. In addition, unlike its ground counterparts, the attack helicopter company has no fire support team (FIST). The battalion fire support officer (FSO) must rely on scout and attack helicopter aircrews to execute the commander's scheme of fires.



Planning. The aviation brigade FSE does much of the fire support planning for the attack helicopter battalion. The key role of the attack helicopter battalion FSO is to plan and execute fire support for the battalion fight.

Fire Support Planning

The attack helicopter battalion commander's greatest challenge is to synchronize and concentrate all of his combat power at the critical time and place. The goal of fire support planning is to integrate fire support into battle plans to optimize this combat power. The FSO works with the battalion staff to translate mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available (METT-T), weather and guidance from higher headquarters and the commander's guidance into the final scheme of fire support. Figure 1 lists typical attack helicopter fire support considerations.

The fire support planning process can be summarized in three steps: mission analysis, course of action (COA) development and war-gaming (including targeting and the development of the decision support template and the fire support and observation plans).

1. Mission Analysis. In this first step in the planning process, the FSO analyzes the mission using the following information: fire support asset allocation and status, brigade commander's intent and concept of fires, fires planned by higher headquarters in zone and limitations and constraints.

- FSO Technique: Train your battalion fire support NCO (FSNCO) to conduct the mission analysis in your absence during high-tempo operations.

To analyze the mission, the FSO first must clearly understand the commander's guidance for fire support. Too often, this guidance reads something like, "suppress enemy air defenses, mass indirect fires to destroy the enemy and execute targets of opportunity, as required." This vague guidance rarely produces a coordinated plan that supports the scheme of maneuver and focuses observers and supporting artillery.

FM 6-20-20 Fire Support at Battalion Task Force and Below, dated 27 December, 1991, states, "The commander's intent serves to prioritize fire support on the battlefield and focus fire support execution at the critical time

Phase: Ingress/Egress

Consider planning—

- Fires on enemy ADA weapons that are a threat along ingress and (or) egress routes.
- Fires on enemy ADA C³, acquisition and tracking radars.
- Fires to suppress enemy direct-fire weapons that could be used in an air defense role along the routes.
- Smoke to restrict enemy observation and optical ADA acquisition and tracking systems.

Consider preparation fires on BPs and in the EA if the advantages outweigh the disadvantages—

- Will the enemy be forewarned of an attack?
- Will the loss of surprise significantly affect the chance of success?
- Are there enough significant targets to justify a preparation?
- Is there enough fire support ammunition to fire an effective preparation?
- Can the enemy recover before the effects can be exploited?
- Will smoke and dust from the preparation degrade attack helicopter observation and gun/missile engagements?

Determine when and how you will shift fires based on one or more of the following—

- Time: At what predetermined time will fires shift?
- Location: When friendly forces reach what location will fires shift (i.e., when the maneuver unit reaches a certain location, such as a phase line)?
- On Call: Shift fires when the maneuver commander directs.
- Event: By what predetermined event will fires shift?

Phase: EA

Consider planning—

- Fires to suppress ADA weapons or direct-fire weapons capable of use in an ADA role.
- Fires to suppress, neutralize or destroy in order to delay, disrupt, limit or attrit enemy forces to help accomplish the mission.
- Fires to suppress enemy forces as friendly elements maneuver.
- Smoke to obscure the enemy force's vision.
- Fires to isolate enemy formations.
- Fires to support disengagement.
- The allocation of priority targets.
- Trigger points for possible moving targets.
- CFZs around battle positions.
- FASCAM to slow or canalize the enemy.

On obstacles, plan—

- Fires behind obstacles to hinder enemy breaching operations.
- FASCAM (if available) to re-seed minefields the enemy has breached.
- Fires to close gaps and lanes in barrier or obstacle plans.
- To integrate obstacle indirect fires to complement direct fires.

Phase: Beyond the EA

Consider planning fires to—

- Suppress or destroy overwatching ADA weapons.
- Impede enemy reinforcements.
- Block avenues of approach for counterattacking enemy forces or repositioning ADA weapons.
- Slow or block the enemy's retreat.
- Interdict enemy follow-on formations.

Legend:

ADA = Air Defense Artillery

BPs = Battle Positions

C³ = Command, Control and Communications

CFZs = Critical Friendly Zones

EA = Engagement Area

FASCAM = Family of Scatterable Mines

Figure 1: Attack Helicopter Fire Support Considerations

and place. To be useful, the commander's intent for fire support must be both understood and feasible. This requires a mutual effort by FSOs and supported commanders to articulate and understand exactly what fire support can and is expected to accomplish during an operation. The commander's requirements of the fire support system must be within the capabilities of the resources available—adjusted as necessary for METT-T factors. The FSO must know and communicate fire support capabilities, limitations and risks during the process of developing the commander's intent for fire support."

• **FSO Technique:** The commander's guidance should address the following: enemy formation to be attacked, enemy function that is unacceptable, desired effects and purpose (the maneuver reason for effects).

• **FSO Technique:** Artillery effects desired can be addressed as those listed in *FM 6-20-10 The Targeting Process*, using the terms: disrupt, delay and limit. These terms apply to the effect that the damage has on the target as it pursues a COA:

"Disrupt" prevents the enemy from carrying out his function in the method he intends. Example: "Disrupt the advance guard's ability to fix our screening force."

"Delay" causes that function or action to happen later than the enemy desires. Example: "Delay 2d Motorized Rifle Company (MRC) until A & B Companies destroy the 1st MRC."

"Limit" prevents that action or function from happening where the enemy wants it to happen. Example: "Limit the advance guard's use of the ridge to position its air defense weapons."

An example of clear commander's guidance is "Disrupt the combined arms reserve 2d Motorized Rifle Company's ability to fix B & C Companies until B & C Companies destroy the 1st MRC with direct fire."

• **FSO Technique:** When planning time is limited, you can help the commander give specific guidance in the decision-making process to help prioritize fire support and focus it at the critical time and place by asking specific questions (see Figure 2).

- Who will indirect fires affect? Answer: The enemy formation or other HPTs.
- What are the desired effects? Answer: To destroy, neutralize, suppress (with assigned numbers and types of vehicles) in order to delay, disrupt, limit, etc.
- How will this be accomplished? Answer: Field Artillery, mortars, CAS, EW, etc.
- Where will it be accomplished? Sample Answers: At EA Red, at TRP1, at target AV2001.
- When will it occur? Sample Answer: When the forward security element is identified, as the 1st MRC crosses DP1.
- How will the task contribute to our success? Sample Answer: Allow B Company to maneuver to BP21.

Legend:

BP = Battle Position

CAS = Close Air Support

DP = Decision Point

EA = Engagement Area

EW = Electronic Warfare

HPTs = High-Payoff Targets

MRC = Motorized Rifle Regiment

TRP = Target Reference Point

Figure 2: Quick Decision-Making Checklist. When planning time is limited, the commander must give specific guidance in the quick decision-making process. The questions listed in this figure help the FSO keep the commander's responses specific and fires focused to accomplish the mission.

2. COA Development. During this phase, the FSO and staff should translate the commander's guidance into a concept of fires for each COA.

• **FSO Technique:** Determine three things. First, the concept of fires in terms of task, purpose, method and end state that achieves the effects required (see the example in Figure 3). Second, determine the tentative triggers and fire support coordinating measures (FSCM); and third, determine the tentative observer focus and positioning.

3. War-Gaming. The war game is the process where the FSO turns the concept of fires into a detailed scheme of fires. The result of the war game is a clear sequence of fire support events with detailed triggers, FSCM and an observer plan. In addition, the staff clearly identifies attack systems, the volume of fires required and high-payoff targets (HPTs).

During the war-gaming process of thinking through the action-reaction-counteraction of each COA, the FSO recommends the concept of fire support that best supports each COA. As the friendly and enemy COA are "fought" in the war-game, the FSO and staff determine how to integrate fire support with the scheme of maneuver. The FSO recommends fire support employment options and determines how fire support will be used with direct fire weapons and maneuver in time and space.

Targeting. This process is an integral part of the detailed war-game of the chosen COA. Targeting is identifying enemy targets for possible engagement and determining the appropriate attack

system to achieve the desired target effects. The emphasis of targeting is on identifying the enemy function or formation he can least afford to lose to accomplish the friendly mission.

To be effective, targeting must be an integral part of engagement area (EA) development and direct fire planning. And most important, targeting decisions must support the commander's intent to affect the target in the way the commander desires.

Targeting in the attack helicopter battalion is not as formal as targeting in the brigade. However, the concept of the process, which identifies HPTs and eventually evolves into attack guidance, is still

• **Task:** Disrupt the 2d MRC.

• **Purpose:** Prevent the 2d MRC from engaging B & C Companies while they destroy the 1st MRC.

• **Method:** A Company eyes on 2d MRC deep with MLRS triggered to fire on the 2d MRC as it enters EA Gold.

• **End State:** 2 BMPs destroyed, flank 2S6s suppressed and 2d MRC unable to engage attack companies.

Legend:

BMPs = Soviet-Made Infantry Combat Vehicle

EA = Engagement Area

MLRS = Multiple-Launch Rocket System

MRC = Motorized Rifle Regiment

Figure 3: Sample Concept of Fires. For each course of action (COA), the FSO determines the concept of fires that will achieve the desired effects.

valid and useful at the battalion level. The HPT list (HPTL) and the attack guidance matrix (AGM) specify what targets are to be acquired and attacked, when they are to be acquired and attacked and what is required to achieve the commander's effects.

The battalion may not develop its own formal HPTL and the AGM or it may use or modify the HPTL and attack guidance developed by brigade and higher FSEs. No matter which products are developed, the focus at the battalion level is to determine the critical information required to detect, prioritize and engage appropriate targets. The bottom line is attack battalion targeting must be time-sensitive and practical.

Targets should be developed by the targeting team: S3 (operations), S2 (intelligence), electronic warfare officer (EWO) and FSO. Targeting as a team ensures the targets are synchronized with and supported by the enemy situation and scheme of maneuver. The FSO advises the targeting team on the fire support system's ability to defeat high-pay-off or other designated targets, the best means of attack and the best type of munitions to achieve the commander's desired results.

Targeting during the war game might go something like this: Armed with the S2's situation and event templates, high-value targets and commander's guidance, the targeting team interacts during war-gaming to develop targeting products. As the staff fights the different options during the war game, the S2 identifies specific high-value targets and the collection means available to acquire these targets (including the FSO's observation plan).

• FSO Technique: With the S3, use your knowledge of friendly weapons systems to determine if a capability exists to attack the high-value targets with lethal and non-lethal assets.

Using this knowledge of friendly attack capabilities and the knowledge of enemy vulnerabilities, the S2 then analyzes and predicts the enemy's response to each attack method. This analysis determines if the attack of the high-value target is necessary to ensure the success of the friendly mission. The high-value targets that meet the criteria of being acquirable, attackable and necessary to ensure friendly force success are designated HPTs and recorded on the deci-

As part of the battlefield calculus during EA development, the FSO should consider—

- How many vehicles will enter the EA?
- How long will the enemy be in the EA?
- How many rounds can I fire during that time?
- How many vehicles will these rounds kill or suppress?
- Can we kill him in the numbers required?

Before a target number is assigned and the target placed on the map, the targeting team should ask—

- What is the purpose of the target?
- Does this target reflect the commander's intent?
- Is this target in synch with the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB)?
- Can this target be observed and triggered?

Figure 4: FSO's Targeting Team Checklist for Engagement Area (EA) Development

sion support template (DST) for that phase of the battle.

In addition, as part of HPT development, the targeting team determines when to acquire and attack targets while also deciding the best means of attack. Knowing target vulnerabilities and the effect a method of attack has on an enemy operation allows the staff to propose the most efficient acquisition and attack means available and the time to attack.

• FSO Technique: With the targeting team, use the aviation mission planning system (AMPS) or terrabase and tactical sensor planner software as tools to identify enemy weapons and radars that can affect friendly operations.

• FSO Technique: Figure out what fire support assets can actually accomplish to meet the commander's guidance. Consider the questions listed in Figure 4 as part of your battlefield calculus during EA development.

Decision Support Template. The DST is developed as the commander and staff form the operations plan during the war-gaming process. War-gaming identifies the decision points (DPs) for the commander while the DST graphically portrays those DPs and the options available to the commander if an action occurs.

The DST identifies the critical fire support triggers on the battlefield and is an aid to the commander and staff in synchronizing the battlefield operating systems. It provides the FSO the information he needs to plan fire support that's synchronized with direct fire and maneuver.

Fire Support Plan. The plan is based on the detailed scheme of fires developed during war-gaming. (See Figure 5.) The fire support execution matrix

BRANCH		★ GO TO # _____	
TRIGGER		2d MRC @ NAI B12	
		DAY	LIM. VIS
		NK341257	NK341257
FS EVENT		#	AVOOII
OBSERVER/EXECUTER		A Co.	
		PRIMARY	ALTERNATE
		AI6	AI1
PURPOSE		EFFECT <u>DISRUPT</u> DELAY LIMIT OTHER	FUNCTION 2d MRC'S ability to engage B & C Cos while they destroy the 1st MRC.
TASK		ATK GUID.	WHAT
		Destroy Suppress	2 BMPs 2S6
WEAPON/MUNITIONS		MLRS	
		UNIT(S)	MUNITIONS
		A/43 FA	6 Rkts
REMARKS		EA Gold	
Legend: EA = Engagement Area MLRS = Multiple-Launch Rocket System MRC = Motorized Rifle Company NAI = Named Area of Interest			

Figure 5: Scheme of Fires. The fire support plan is based on the detailed scheme of fires developed during war-gaming.

- Commander's Guidance for Fire Support
- Availability of Fire Support Assets and their Status
- Fire Support Execution Matrix (with a clear sequence of fire support events)
- Target List
- Priority of Targets and Engagement Criteria (listing the type of target to attack first and how to attack—high-payoff target list, or HPTL, and attack guidance matrix, or AGM)
- Observation Plan (who observes/fires each target and where each primary and secondary observer is positioned to see the trigger/target)
- Priority of Fires (which element receives fire support in case of competing demands)

Figure 6: Fire Support Plan Checklist

(FSEM) and detailed observer plans are the fire support products developed during the war game. (See Figure 6 for the fire support plan checklist.)

The fire support plan must articulate the critical time and place to focus fires, who will trigger and control the fires, where the observer will position himself to see triggers and targets, which targets to shoot (number and type of vehicle, formation, etc.), when and where to shoot them, what target effects are desired, which type of indirect weapon and munition will achieve the commander's desired results and the purpose of shooting the target.

Observation and Execution. If a target is important enough to target, it's important enough to assign an observer to control fires. Because attack helicopter companies don't have assigned FISTs, the battalion FSO normally assigns observer responsibilities to the companies. However, the FSO must receive bottom-up refinement from the companies on the details of their observation plan to validate their ability to execute the battalion fire support plan. All targets should have alternate observers assigned in case the primary observer is unable to fire the target.

- FSO Technique: Use the AMPS or terrabase to analyze terrain to determine observer line-of-sight and help select observation posts.

With no FISTs in the companies, the FSO carefully decides where he and his FSNCO should locate for mission execution. He normally has four options: locate with the battalion commander, S3, battalion command post or tactical command post. He positions himself and his FSNCO to best support the commander's concept of fires. But the type of aircraft used by the commander and S3 and the radio capabilities of any airborne command and control post affect the FSO's decision.

The FSO and S3 also decide how the observer will send fire missions and spot reports to the fire direction center (FDC). The FSO usually requires observers to send all fire missions through him or the FSNCO. This way, the FSO can clear fires and ensure the missions support the scheme of fires and commander's concept.

In addition, the attack helicopter battalion may require an aerial or ground radio retransmission team to talk over long distances to the supporting artillery.

The FSO also may request quick-fire channels to facilitate rapid communications with the supporting artillery. This is usually most effective when supported by division or corps GS assets.

Attack helicopter battalions typically receive missions to attack second-echelon and reserve forces, stop enemy penetrations and to con-

duct screens forward or to the flanks of the ground maneuver forces. For these missions, the attack helicopter battalion often needs to fire into the ground maneuver zone of action, requiring careful clearance of fires. FSOs develop and coordinate maneuver and fire support control measures to safeguard friendly elements and ease rapid clearance of fires outside the battalion's zone. In addition, the FSO develops plans to control and coordinate indirect fires within the attack helicopter battalion's subordinate units.

- FSO Technique: To clear fires, the FSO establishes and practices positive controls (maneuver control measures and FSCM); establishes simple procedures for external (adjacent and higher) and internal (company) clearance of fires and includes them in standing operating procedures (SOPs); and uses aviation brigade liaison teams for detailed coordination with external units.

The combat power of the attack helicopter battalion is most effective when synchronized with massed indirect fires. The FSO plays a crucial role during the planning process to integrate these fires. As a combat multiplier available to the attack helicopter battalion commander, fire support plays a key part in the application of firepower and maneuver.



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The attack helicopter battalion FSO and company commander rehearse the fire support plan.